

[#YALICHAT on Volunteerism and Civic Leadership](#)

When you're willing to volunteer your time, smarts, and energy, how do you make sure your efforts have the maximum impact?

Jeff Franco is vice president and executive director of City Year Washington, DC, a nonprofit organization whose teams of young adults commit to a year of full-time service keeping students in school and on track to graduate. Since joining the organization in 2008, he has quadrupled the number of students and schools served and more than doubled the organization's fundraising capacity. He's also a YALI Network Online Course Instructor! Take his class "[Attracting and Motivating Volunteers](#)" or "[Inspiring Community Participation.](#)"

Jeff held a #YALICHAT on [Facebook](#) about the benefits of volunteering and how to motivate those around you to get involved.

Read highlights below:



[What are the Benefits of Service to a Greater Cause?](#)

It is service to a cause greater than oneself that inspires the greatest form of leadership.  Serving each other is in our genetic makeup. We are meant to take the time to give back to our communities, despite the common misperception that life is only about getting what is owed to you. Service doesn't have to be a choice between acting in one's own self-interest and acting in the best interests of others, because giving back can be as fulfilling and enriching for the volunteer as for the community that receives the extra help.

Some of the benefits that volunteerism provides are straightforward, such as resume and network building. Yet, many of the benefits of volunteering are immeasurable. When I volunteer, I feel joy

and fulfillment. I grow in my own abilities and skill sets. I learn about the world around me and about the ways that I can help to work for justice in my community. I am enriched by each relationship that I create along the way, and I have fun meeting other like-minded people who may have grown up in a completely different community from my own.

Now more than ever, communities are realizing the impact of volunteer experience on developing well-rounded citizens. Many high schools and colleges in America require students to commit a certain number of community-service hours prior to graduation. Employers in America find candidates to be more attractive when they have volunteer activities on their resumes. Our AmeriCorps volunteers at City Year find more job opportunities and grow their professional networks after committing their hours of service with us. For our AmeriCorps volunteers, serving with City Year is often the catalyst that leads them into careers in teaching, public policy, other nonprofits, or law firms. There is no limit to how much our national service organization opens doors for our young idealists.

At City Year, we believe that the youth of our communities carry the idealism, the energy and the unique solutions to face the challenges that face our society. As an organization, City Year's vision is that one day the most commonly asked question of a young person will be: "Where are you going to do your service year?" Think of how much it would change our societies if our young people were expected to complete one year of direct service to their communities as a rite of passage into the working world. The future of our communities rests on the shoulders of those who are willing to voluntarily make the world a better place. If we are not happy with our communities, then it is our obligation to do something positive to change them.

In my upcoming #YALICHAT, I welcome questions on the benefits of volunteerism in a community, on how to inspire community participation, and on motivating and attracting volunteers toward a cause.

Jeff Franco is vice president and executive director of City Year Washington, DC, a nonprofit organization whose teams of diverse young adults commit to a year of full-time service keeping students in school and on track to graduate. Since joining the organization in 2008, he has quadrupled the number of students and schools served, doubled the size of the staff and more than doubled the organization's fundraising capacity. He has led the development and implementation of a strategic plan that will again grow City Year Washington, DC's size and impact to reach at least half of the students who drop out of school in Washington.

'Let's All Go Green'

Mavis Nduchwa enjoys one of her “wow  moments” of appreciating the view in the Makgadikgadi salt pans. A meerkat, common in the deserts of Botswana, perches on her knee. (Courtesy of Mavis Nduchwa)

One evening in Botswana’s Okavango Delta, YALI Network member Mavis Nduchwa attended a dinner with the late South African conservation pioneer Ian Player. The founder of the Wilderness Foundation in South Africa and the United Kingdom, and of the WILD Foundation in the United States, “made me realize the important role I can play in helping to conserve nature,” Nduchwa recalls.

Now a manager of Planet Baobab, a travel lodge at the edge of Botswana’s Makgadikgadi salt pans southeast of the delta, Nduchwa helps guests appreciate and protect their surroundings.

“I cannot imagine my life without wildlife,”

she says. Linking conservation with her livelihood, she stresses that her park job has allowed her to build a house and to send her nieces and nephews to school.

The Makgadikgadi pans, in the middle of northeastern Botswana’s dry savanna, are the remains of an enormous lake that once covered an area larger than Switzerland. The area makes up one of the largest salt flats in the world. During the harsh dry season, the salty desert has little plant life. But following the rainy season, the pans become a critical habitat for migrating animals, including wildebeest, zebra, white pelicans and greater flamingos.

While the government of Botswana is addressing threats to the environment like deforestation, erosion, and illegal hunting, Nduchwa feels more can be done. She suggests training educators about conservation so they can teach the public about what everyone can do to use natural resources carefully. She says conservation outreach to people who live in rural areas and don’t have access to radio messaging is particularly needed.

“People should understand that it is our responsibility to look after our environment,” Nduchwa believes. “They should understand why they should not walk past a plastic bag or a can in the wild. With the right knowledge of the damage that does to the environment, individuals can do a lot. We need to empower them with knowledge.”

Mavis Nduchwa takes a break from  managing the Planet Baobab lodge in Botswana’s Makgadikgadi salt pans.(Mavis Nduchwa)

Nduchwa is doing her own part. She volunteers at local schools, helping students understand “the importance of looking after our environment.” And she teaches local women about farming methods that are safe for the environment, like using crop stems to feed pigs and chicken manure instead of chemicals to fertilize gardens.

Nduchwa adds that businesses, too, can partner with communities to help conserve natural resources and protect wildlife. Planet Baobab, for example, has adopted conservation practices like having guests and employees refill their plastic water bottles instead of disposing of them when they are empty.

Nduchwa says that using environment-friendly practices can be good for businesses' bottom lines. "More companies and individuals would want to associate themselves with such businesses," she notes, adding that she prefers to buy from businesses that sell products made from recycled materials like paper and plastic.

That recycling also generates jobs, she notes, pointing to the women weavers who make and sell hats, mats and even greeting cards out of recycled materials.

"I always like to see a clean environment around us," Nduchwa says, adding that her village won an award for being the country's "most clean village."

Nduchwa suggests that teachers can get young people involved in conservation by organizing them to collect discarded cans and bottles for recycling or for use in their school science projects. "Make the experience as fun as possible," she suggests.

"Let's teach our kids to conserve while they are still young," she says. "Let's all go green."

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

[Six Ways You Can Do Your Part to Conserve Wildlife](#)

Elephants are just one of Africa's iconic species — and one of the world's most  vulnerable.

There are more than 7 billion people on Earth. Imagine if every one of us committed to do one thing — no matter how small — to protect wildlife every day. Even minor actions can have a major impact when we all work together. Here are ways you can make a difference:

Philip recycles discarded and  disinfected plastics into sheets through the organization Full Circle Africa.

1. Pitch In.

Trash isn't just ugly, it's harmful. Birds can trap their heads in plastic rings. Fish can get stuck in nets. Plus, trash pollutes everyone's natural resources. Do your part by putting trash in its place and keeping your community clean.

2. Recycle.

Find new ways to use things you already own. Manoh Philip Sesay, a YALI Network member in Sierra Leone, uses discarded plastics to create shopping bags, handbags and computer bags.

3. Restore.

Habitat destruction is the main threat to 85 percent of all threatened and endangered species, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. You can help reduce this threat by [planting native trees](#) or cleaning up beaches in your area.

4. Join.

Whether you're more interested in protecting natural habitats or preventing wildlife trafficking, find the organization that speaks to your passion. If such an organization doesn't exist in your community, create one!

Organizations such as Save the Rhino provide volunteer opportunities in Kenya, Uganda  and Zimbabwe.

5. Volunteer.

One way to support an organization is to donate your time. Many offer volunteer programs. You can help clean beaches, rescue wild animals or teach tourists about your local habitat.

6. Speak Up.

Share your passion for wildlife conservation with your family. Tell your friends how they can help. Ask everyone you know to do what they can to help conserve Africa's wildlife.

Sharing Ideas and Cooperation

Members of the YALI Network are working in their communities to improve health awareness. Alport Ndebele is a YALI member who describes his work as a peer educator. He leads youth programs on reproductive health in communities in the Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe.

I lead a team of youth leaders under the National AIDS Council of Zimbabwe. I operate in Bulawayo

urban and rural districts, running programs and activities that have a sole goal of bringing innovation through involvement and volunteerism.

This is a community that is short on education, information and communication of all sorts. We want to try to cover that gap by bringing in social activities where we disseminate and discuss health information.

Alport Ndebele conducts a health  education program for a group of young people in Umguza District, Matabeleland North province, Zimbabwe.

We trained a total of 20 peer educators with communication and public speaking skills, and have boosted their esteem and confidence in doing so. They stand before their peers and educate each other on sensitive issues such as sexual reproductive health, a topic never discussed in some families. We have held events like sports galas and quiz competitions that have attracted over 200 youths per event in rural settings.

We now even have clubs formed at the village level that meet on a weekly basis and continue to share ideas and cooperation for the betterment of their community.

My membership in the YALI Network is helping me learn more about other related activities and policies relating to social development and improvement of my community. Most of all, I, myself, gain inspiration from resources being shared in this network.

Can the YALI Network create social exchange programs for youths to meet, share and exchange ideas with other youth leaders from different parts of the world with common goals? It is possible to move a mountain by shovelling pebbles off its base. I believe in humble beginnings, hence YALI might just be a space that will benefit my group.

Alport Ndebele conducts health education programs in Zimbabwe, affiliated with a nongovernmental organization called Hope for a Child in Christ.

Promoting Good Health Through Community Education

“People do learn how to watch their diets.” — YALI Network member Ebelenna Anekwe

YALI Network member Ebelenna Anekwe is a volunteer peer educator who inspires neighbors in his Nigerian community to think more about how they can improve their health.

Ebelenna Anekwe checks a neighbor's  blood pressure.

He does that by teaching them about nutrition levels in the food they eat. He encourages them to get regular medical check-ups — including blood pressure and diabetes screenings — and to take their medicines and other treatments as prescribed. Since 2013, he has reached 100 people ranging from youth to the elderly.

Anekwe, 25, is a physical therapy student at the University of Maiduguri. Since 2009 he has volunteered with the nonprofit International Center for Advocacy on Right to Health, also known as Alliance Rights Nigeria. He began his work there by taking patients' vital signs, which indicate general physical health, give clues to possible diseases and show progress toward recovery. "My family works with me to make great change in our community," he says.

"I believe peoples' attitudes have changed" about maintaining their health, he said. "People do learn how to watch their diets."

Anekwe is helping to spread a message about cardiovascular disease that is sometimes overlooked in Africa, where infectious disease is frequently portrayed as the most immediate health threat. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more people in the world die of heart disease and stroke than from any other cause. Heart disease and stroke risk factors include unhealthy diet and physical inactivity. Diabetes is a chronic disease that occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body cannot use the insulin it produces. Diabetes increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Early Challenges Inspire Later Success

Entrepreneur and community volunteer Christopher Asego credits the challenges of growing up in a slum as inspiration for wanting to help end poverty.

"The world has lots of problems. People who live them every day have the best solutions," he says on his Facebook page.

In June, Asego, a YALI Network member, spent two weeks in Chicago and Washington learning how innovators and entrepreneurs in the United States tackle their common business challenges. His visit was sponsored by the Global Innovation through Science and Technology (GIST) initiative and included young entrepreneurs from Kenya, Uganda, Jordan, Tunisia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Growing up, Asego attended an overcrowded school in Nairobi's Kibera area. Too shy to question his

teacher when he didn't understand something, he lagged behind his classmates. "Not every child can learn in the same way at the same speed," he said.

But Asego had an advantage. His mother was a teacher and stuck by her son until he graduated from secondary school. "Not every child is as lucky as I was. ... A lot of children who experience early failure in school end up dropping out," he said.

Now 27, Asego went on to graduate from Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. He partnered with two peers to create Eneza Education, a firm that serves as a mobile phone-based tutor and teacher's assistant. Eneza, which means "to reach" or "to spread," aims "to make 50 million kids across Africa smarter," according to the company's website.

Asego said he will take what he learned in the United States back to his community and company. He especially wants to share his knowledge with "up-and-coming entrepreneurs" who face the challenges of getting a business off the ground. "Back home, when you approach an investor, they want to see traction — traction you don't have because you are just a startup," he said.

Aside from his business, Asego volunteers to help eradicate jiggers from his community. Jiggers are tropical parasitic insects that "affect the interiors of the toes of children when they walk barefoot," Asego said. With other volunteers involved in the nationwide effort to eradicate jiggers from Kenya by 2015, Asego goes house-to-house to wash children's feet with a disinfectant.

"I have developed some kind of attachment to the slum because I grew up there," he said.

Photo credit: Christopher Asego
